

A Study in the Criticism of Prose  
Fiction from Daniel Defoe to  
Jane Austen

by Hulda L. Ise

*June, 1912*

Submitted to the Department of English of the  
University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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## Contents.

Introduction.....	1
Criticism of prose fiction to 1720.....	1
The Realists.....	8
Defoe.....	8
Richardson.....	15
Fielding.....	20
Smollet.....	26
Sterne.....	27
Abuse of Fiction.....	30
Circulating libraries.....	30
Anonymous publication.....	34
Entrance of women writers.....	35
Sentimental School.....	36
Gothic Romance.....	36
Walpole.....	37
Clara Reeves.....	37
Mrs. Radcliffe.....	37
Domestic Novel.....	41
Miss Burney.....	42
Goldsmith.....	43
Jane Austen.....	43
Miss Reeves Criticisms.....	38

## Prefatory Note.

This investigation was undertaken with the purpose of ascertaining the relation of prose fiction to other types of literature during the period intervening between the time of Defoe and the time of Jane Austen, and of finding out what understanding of the technique and purpose of the novel existed among critics and writers of that time. In the investigation an effort has been made to discover what contemporary recognition was given to the different schools, and to see whether development in the type was the result of critical study or whether it was an unconscious evolution brought about by general literary and social progress.

This period (1720-1800) marks the beginning of the novel as we now know it, but there had been many works of fiction written in prose from the time of Caxton to the time of Defoe, and the alert Elizabethans did not fail to express critical opinions concerning this unauthorized departure from literary traditions. Eighteenth cent-

ury criticism can not be fully understood without a knowledge of the criticism preceding it and upon which the later criticism rested. For that reason an introductory discussion of earlier criticism is added to this report.

Of the sources of information available to a student in the University of Kansas, the Gentleman's Magazine contributes most. Clara Reeve's History of Romance, published in 1789, contains a summary of the critical opinions relating to the type up to 1770, and though perhaps not an impartial presentation of the material, the information gained from it was most helpful in this attempt. The prefaces to the novels written during the period studied, and critical opinions expressed within the novels themselves, were the sources next in importance.

A STUDY IN THE CRITICISM OF PROSE FICTION  
FROM DANIEL DEFOE TO JANE AUSTEN.

Introductory.

The PreElizabethan writers, who first gave prose fiction any serious attention, seem to have done so without being aware of beginning a new type of literature. At least none of them makes his position clear in regard to the new school, if he recognized it as a school. Caxton defends his *Morte d' Arthur* (1845) on ethical and patriotic grounds, giving as its didactic purpose the representation of retribution or reward for wrong or right living. He seems somewhat anxious to defend himself by putting forward proof that there was historic probability in his story of Arthur, and by calling attention to the obvious allegory in *Reynard the Fox*.

The unwillingness of these early writers to be charged with prose fiction seems to have explanation in a canon of literary criticism referred to by Ascham when he says that prose

is not for imagination but for fact. In all the early criticism that understanding of the fields proper for prose and verse obtains, and evidently there is an assumption that fiction written in prose is so written because the author lacks ability to write in verse. The old classic fictions excited no criticism for they obeyed the accepted rules of literature.

Painter, in his *Palace of Pleasure*, escapes criticism for his prose style because his work was merely a translation from the Italian prose. But his translation brought a crushing weight of criticism upon the type itself and Ascham inveighed against it with all his vigorous command of the youthful English tongue. Ascham and those who upheld the old traditions had maintained that no good could come out of that hybrid type of literature which Painter's translation represented, and Ascham, at least, almost exults in indignation at its moral unfitness.

More seemed to be guided in writing his *Utopia* by the same idea of maintaining the actual truth of what he wrote in prose. As sermons, essays, and history covered the ground granted to prose, nearly all the early writers bolster

up their claims of the actual truthfulness of their stories by adding a didactic purpose and relating their work to the sermon. Caxton makes timid claim to moral value for his romances and More really had that purpose in writing. Caxton purposed little more than entertainment, but he felt that hardly a sufficient justification and so goes about to show that didactic purposes are often best served by properly chosen entertainment. He anticipates the critics and explains that he wrote in prose instead of verse because he was not master of verse.

Painter openly advocated fiction for the purpose of entertainment and was followed by the Elizabethan writers, Greene, Nash, Breton, Dekker, Fulke Greville, and others. But they were pioneers; the distrust of the majority still remained, and stiffnecked upholders of literary standards refused to recognize the new type as worthy of serious consideration even after Sidney had written his *Arcadia* and Lyly his *Euphues*. Before them there had been no thought of making prose a work of art. Prose fiction entertained solely by

virtue of incident and plot, and other prose was merely useful, - not literary. But Webbe recognized the new promise of technique and style, for which he praises Lyly, although he is not more concrete than praise of Lyly's "singular eloquence and brave composition of apt words."

Nash rails against the romance and the habit of imitating the "exiled abbie lubbers (monks) from whose idle pens proceeded those wornout impressions of the feigned nowhere acts of Arthur of the rounde table.... and infinite others," and defends his Jack Wilton as containing "some reasonable conveyances of history and variety of mirth." Incipient recognition of the two main classes of fiction is here first shown. Ascham poured out his wrath against Painter's "bawdie stories translated out of Italian to marre men's maners in England," and against the Morte d' Arthur, without thinking of their differences. They were one in evil, and the evil is what he saw, although his manner of designating them implies a distinction.



He calls *Morte d'Arthur* a mediaeval romance and speaks of Painter's translations as stories. Painter called his fictions histories or novels and both names adhered to the type as is shown in titles and criticisms two hundred years later.

Dekker, like Nash, advocated realistic work,—that is, truthful pictures of contemporary life,—and praised Nash for his technique and rhetorical ability. Fulke Greville defends prose fiction, particularly Sidney's *Arcadia*, because by it "barren philosophical precepts are turned into pregnant images of life..." and history is made concrete.

Toward the end of the Elizabethan period and the beginning of the Jacobean the youthful interest in prose fiction loses ground. Bacon thinks of it as having a useful place, "but not a thing to take very seriously," and Jonson, as Mr. Saintsbury says, was for order, uniformity and classicism against liberty, variety, and romance. The early defenders of prose fiction were gone and no new champions rose in their places. Thomas Hobbes, 1588-1679, says, "They

that give entrance to fictions writ in prose err not so much, but they err..." Davenant evidently realized the low mark of popularity for the novel or romance, if we may judge from the preface to *Gondibert*, and tried to blend that type with the old epic and create the new heroic poem. Milton, though his ear was not attuned to the voice of the people, was aware of the new type and comments on it. He says of the *Arcadia* that "it is nothing but a vain amatorious poem, but in that kind full of worth and wit." Prose fiction was the entertainment of the common people, after Sidney and Lyly lost their glamor, and Milton with his "fit audience though few" was not ambitious to be popular.

During the Restoration the novel is neglected. Mackenzie, in his Apology for Aretina (1661), defends romance on the plea that it "sets off moral philosophy". He says, "Albeit Essays be the choisest pearls in the Jewel house of Moral Philosophy, yet I ever thought that they were set off to the best advantage and appeared

with the greatest lustre, when they were laced upon a Romance." His style alone would lead one to suspect the preference he confesses, for it takes no very keen critic to detect the style of the master whom he followed. Congreve prefaces or preludes his dramatic work with the novel Incognita (1692). He distinguishes between novel and romance,- the first critical distinction made, apparently. The romance bears the same relation to the novel that tragedy bears to comedy, he says, and classifies the work of his period into dramas, heroic romances and novels. By novels he probably meant stories dealing with humble life.

In the Augustan period the novel is again able to claim some slight attention, meagre though its share had to be, when Swift, Steele, and Addison and their followers were claiming so nearly all the praise that the English people had to give. William Law, in his Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life (1729) advocates fiction because in that way didactic teaching is made effective. But the great representative of the

novel, limited to mean the realistic portrayal of humble life, was Defoe. With him the modern novel begins.

It is hard to come at the reception given by critical readers to Defoe's fiction. Defoe was a journalist and evidently his readers thought as little of commenting on the literary qualities of his writing as we do of seriously considering those qualities in an everyday reporter for a newspaper. Defoe wrote with no literary theories or ideals apparently, and found himself working in the field of fiction without intending any such thing. The material which Alexander Selkirk's adventures supplied, furnished Defoe with his first story, Robinson Crusoe (1719), a highly imaginative biography. The author in his journalistic work had been writing biographies, and when opportunity offered a subject as popular as Alexander Selkirk, he made use of it under a different name.

Defoe's life had been one long lesson in

meeting difficulties, and his experiences gave him a knowledge of many crafts and countries. For these reasons it hardly seems necessary to assume that some favoring muse presided over the creation of Robinson Crusoe. Defoe with his long training in life and journalism was merely determined to write an imaginary biography that would pass for a true one. The subject apparently mastered the writer somewhat and shaped itself into an inimitable work, but Defoe no more understood the secret than did the readers who rejoiced in the tale. It was a biography, and the stories following were biographies, - which Defoe refused to class with fiction. In the preface to the next work, Duncan Campbell (1720), he asserts that the book is a biography but more interesting than are the biographies of average people because that life had included "a great variety of incidents and diversity of circumstances". He claims a universal power of appeal for "prince and peasant" and calls attention to the instruction contained in the book.

In the preface to the first edition of

the next book, Memoirs of a Cavalier (1720), Defoe contrives a new device for inducing the public to accept his fiction as truth. He says that the manuscript was found among old papers which were obtained as plunder after a battle. Under this illusion he is free to call attention to whatever he felt to be strong elements in the work, such as the "soldierly style", the aid to history, and the wonderful variety of incident. He thinks to make the possibility of detection less by impartially giving some adverse criticism and therefore he comments on the lack of conclusion and climax. In the preface to the second edition Defoe took pains to refute classification of the book as a romance. Evidently there had been readers who found the biography less than convincing.

The prefaces to Roxana (1724) and Moll Flanders (1722) both lay claim to actual historical truth and dwell with decided unction upon the didactic purpose. Defoe realized the occasion that he had given for adverse criticism on the grounds of morality and he took every occasion to defend himself as well as he could, by showing

that wicked actions and vice were always punished in his books and the way of the transgressor made hard all along. Defoe was a man whose every action was prompted by materialistic motives, and his protestations and explanations are no more to be trusted than are the statements of advertisers nowadays. He knew that people would read what he wrote,- the taste of the nation was not generally so delicate as to revolt at the frank portrayal of anything except heretical church or political opinions,- and Defoe wrote to sell. Then that he might catch all readers,- those bent on reform as well as those with not over-nice taste,- he proclaimed that he wrote what he did for moral purposes. When he found that there were readers who would welcome criticism of fiction he entered the field of criticism, a field in which he had few competitors, for not many writers of note had honored fiction with serious consideration. Apparently the early fiction was regarded by real literary people much as rag time music is by musicians now. Occasionally wrath would force an expression from some long-suffering conservative,

but in the main prose fiction was written for the populace and little was said about it either way, except for purposes of advertising as this by Defoe.

One critic in speaking of Robinson Crusoe declared that "the book seems calculated for the mob, and will not bear the eye of a rational reader" and that "all but the very canaille are satisfied of the worthlessness of the performance". But the sneers of hostile critics did not disturb Defoe. He was used to that, and as long as he realized an ample profit on his ventures critics might receive his books as they chose. Future sales had to be considered, however, and public opinion mollified.

In the preface to The Serious Reflections of Robinson Crusoe we are told that Robinson Crusoe is an allegory and in one of the chapters we are told why it is an allegory. He says (third chapter, Of Talking Falsely) that ~~it~~ <sup>it</sup> was intended to symbolize his own solitary and self-reliant career,<sup>and</sup> adds that although allegorical, it is also historically true. Probably this statement



about the allegory came as a hasty explanation, for the story after he had inveighed against "telling stories, as many people do, merely to amuse." "This supplying a story by invention," he says, "is certainly a scandalous crime and yet very little regarded in the past. It is a sort of lying that makes a great hole in the heart, in which by degrees a habit of lying enters in. Such a man comes quickly up to a total disregard of what he says, looking upon it as a trifle, a thing of no import, whether any story he tells be true or not. How simple a satisfaction is this purchased at so great an expense as that of conscience and of dishonor done to truth!" A man who tells a lie, properly so called, has some hope of reward by it; but "to lie for sport is to play at shuttlecock with your soul and load your conscience for the mere sake of being a fool... With what temper shall I speak of these people? What words can express the meanness and baseness of the mind that can do this?"

None of these expressions from Defoe's pen can have much value, in themselves, as criti-

cism, for Defoe did not mean what he said, and they do not even represent what other people would have had him say, for he seems intent only upon causing a sensation which will add to the selling power of his work. As one expects, there is no thoughtful conclusion regarding the novel expressed by him. People evidently hesitated about reading imaginary histories but enjoyed what their scruples forbade, and therefore Defoe wrote what "the people" wanted and soothed their consciences by assuring them that what they read was the truth. If there was to be any uneasiness about the falsity of the compositions Defoe undertook to bear it, - as well as the profits accruing.

And there were profits, for Defoe received a considerable income from his work. His affairs were apparently conducted as a secret service man may have grown in the habit of conducting business. At least there is no record of receipts to be found.

Defoe had no wide acquaintance with the field of literary labors, and there is no evidence that he saw the work that he did in relation to

the classic types. He stumbled into fiction and succeeded in the field without knowing what he was doing. He did seem to realize that his biographical method was weak in the matter of climax and conclusion, for he explains that weakness and apologizes for it in two of the prefaces, those to Memoirs of a Cavalier and Moll Flanders. In the last named one he says, "We can not say, indeed, that this history is carried on quite to the end of Moll Flanders' life." In all expressions he disclaims any attempt at style. In studying Defoe's conception of the novel, one has always to bear in mind that fiction was only a minor consideration with him.

The next novel writer was no more scholarly than Defoe and wrote his first novel with as little understanding of technique or literary art. He happened upon his first success without previous thought of the work. Richardson was not a literary scholar, nor a very critical reader. He probably did not know that the Duchess of Newcastle had introduced something very much like his letter novel as early as 1662. He himself adds

little to the criticism of the novel and that little is not purely literary. The epistolary style brought him success and much practise gave him command of its resources. Consequently he advocates that style as the most fitting for fiction. He says, in the preface to *Clarissa Harlowe*:

"All the letters are written while the hearts of the writers must be supposed to be wholly engaged in their subjects (the events at the time generally dubious); so that they abound not only with critical situations, but with what may be called instantaneous descriptions and reflections (proper to be brought home to the breast of the youthful reader); as also with affecting conversations, many of them written in the dialogue or dramatic way.

"Much more lively and affecting must be the style of those who write in the height of the present distress; the mind tortured by the pangs of uncertainty (the events then hidden in the womb of fate); than the dry, narrative, unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and dangers surmounted, can be; the relater perfectly at ease; and

if himself unmoved by his own story, not likely greatly to affect the reader."

Richardson, too, maintained that he wrote for didactic purposes, and with a view of "introducing a new species of writing that might possibly turn young people into a course of reading different from the pomp and parade of romance-writing; and dismissing the improbable and marvelous with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue". We have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the statement.

Everything indicates that the novel was the entertainment of the common people rather than of the upper classes, and yet the democratization of the novel is one of the purposes Richardson claimed for his work. Pamela, however, immediately became popular with all classes who could read. The Gentleman's Magazine records three editions between February and May of 1741, all three editions selling at six shillings. The size of the editions was not given, but the fact that three editions followed each other so rapidly after a first had been sold, indicates the unusual popu-

larity of the book. Just before the second edition came out the Gentleman's Magazine printed the following notice at the end of its list of books published:

"Several encomiums on a series of familiar letters published but last March, entitled Pamela or Virtue Rewarded, came too late for this magazine and we believe there will be little occasion for inserting them in our next; because a second edition will come out to supply the demand in the country, it being judged in town as great a Sign of Want of Curiosity not to have read Pamela, as not to have seen the French and Italian Dancers." An example of the extravagant praise given Richardson is found in a quotation from Sherlock's Original Letters. In speaking of Clarissa he says: "It is injuring Richardson to quote a trait of Pathos from him when he has whole volumes which it is impossible to read without crying and sobbing from beginning to end... There does not exist in the whole universe a work equal to it for WIT, SENTIMENT and SENSE."

In May 1742 a new edition in four volumes with twenty-nine copperplates was put on the

market for one pound four shillings. Apparently Richardson had succeeded in raising to the Peerage the novel he had proposed to democratize.

The book was not merely a nine days' wonder among the idle people in town but claimed the attention of men of letters. Morley says (*Life of Fielding*): "Pope is reported to have said that it (*Pamela*) would do more good than many volumes of sermons; ministers extolled it from the pulpit and clergymen dedicated theological treatises to its author." Richardson was known as the author of the book and enjoyed the fame and profit, - a profit not equaled by the writers of accepted types, - but his name does not appear in the notices printed by the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Evidently he followed the fashion of his time and published anonymously.

The success of Pamela brought out many direct imitations and related works, especially novels written in the form of letters. The *Gentleman's Magazine*, in the first year after the publication of Pamela, records Pamela Censured, (1s), Pamela's Conduct in High Life (3w), Anti Pamela, (no price given), Pamela or the Fair Imposter

and many other titles that suggest the influence of Richardson's book.

As some of the titles show, the imitations were not always complimentary in tone. The parody was not a new form of criticism,- it had been most effective in the time of Swift and a derisive parody had been directed at Defoe's work under the title "The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Daniel d' Foe, of London, Hosier, who lived all alone in the uninhabited island of Great Britain..."

Most of the parodies ridiculing Pamela received little notice, apparently. They are listed cheap and were probably brief and hastily written. One, however, was the first novel from the pen of a writer whose fame in a few years equaled, if it did not excel Richardson's.

Henry Fielding (1707-1754) was a man of broader scholarship than Richardson, his experiences had been wider and his literary knowledge and inheritance excelled Richardson's. He had written for the stage and knew dramatic history and technique. He had been trained at Eton and knew the classics, or at least had lived in the atmosphere of classic



scholarship. He came of a noble family and knew law and lawyers, politics and politicians. To this robust, not over-scrupulous man of the world Richardson's persecuted but virtuous and politic fair one was the occasion for "inextinguishable Homeric laughter". Fielding needed money and he recognized the opportunity to win notice, at least, by a burlesque of the best seller of the times. The Gentleman's Magazine records the publication of The Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams, by H. Fielding, in August 1742. A third edition "with cutts, 6s." appeared in March, 1743.

Fielding, though perhaps less favorably received than Richardson in his own time, was a better critic, and in the judgment of present readers, a better novelist. In the preface to Joseph Andrews he publishes the most interesting bit of novel criticism of the time. After marking the division of the epic, like the drama, into tragedy and comedy, he points out that the epic may exist in prose as well as in verse, and he proceeds to explain that what he has attempted in

Joseph Andrews is a "Comic Epic Poem in Prose", differing from serious romance in its substitution of "a light and ridiculous fable for a grave and solemn one; of inferior characters for those of superior rank; and of ludicrous for sublime sentiments". "Poetry," he says, "may be either in verse or in prose; for though it lacks in one particular, which the critic enumerates in the constituent parts of an epic poem, namely metre; yet when any kind of writing contains all its other parts, such as fable, action, characters, sentiments and diction, and is deficient in metre only, it seems, I think, reasonable to refer it to the epic; at least as no critic hath thought proper to range it under another head, or to assign it a particular name to itself." Another passage in the preface is worthy of remark. With reference to the pictures of vice which the book contains, he observes: "First, That it is very difficult to pursue a Series of human Actions, and keep clear of them. Secondly, That the Vices to be found here (Joseph Andrews) are rather the accidental Consequences of some human Frailty, or Foible, than Causes habitually existing in the Mind. Thirdly, That they

are never set forth as the Objects of ridicule but Detestation. Fourthly, That they are never the principal Figures at the time on the Scene; and, lastly, they never produce the evil intended."

In the preface to Tom Jones, Fielding explains that his inclination is rather to the middle and lower classes than "to the highest Life", which he thinks affords very little humor or entertainment. He does not propose to present his readers with models of perfection. One of the most thoroughly realistic ideas that he expresses is that virtue is not always "the certain Road to Happiness nor Vice to Misery", and he attempts to show that, but he says that his purpose, after all, is "to recommend Goodness and Innocence and promote the cause of religion and virtue". He says nothing, directly, about realistic portrayal of life, but evidently such a statement was unnecessary,- the fact was patent.

If Fielding wrote for moral purposes, many of his readers apparently misunderstood him. Hannah More says that Johnson censured her for alluding to a passage in Tom Jones, the only time he was ever angry or impatient with her; Gray, in a letter to

West, quotes the verdict credited to Johnson (Boswell's Life, Croker edition, p. 130), that the virtues of Fielding's heroes are the vices of truly good men; and Miss Reeves, in her History of Romance, says that Tom Jones is capable of doing much mischief, and for that reason a translation of it was forbidden in France. Johnson put his ban on Tom Jones, but Mrs. Piozzi (Anecdotes, p. 22) says that he pronounced Amelia one of the most pleasing heroines of Romance.

In the critical estimates of Richardson and Fielding, Johnson makes the following distinction: "There is all the difference in the world between characters of nature and characters of manners; and there is the difference between the characters of Richardson and those of Fielding. There is as great a difference between them, as between a man who knows how a watch is made and one who can tell the hour by looking on the face of the watch... There is more knowledge of the heart in one of Richardson's letters than in all Tom Jones."

Richardson was hostile to Fielding as he might well have been, but he was not very dignified

in his criticism of his rival. He loaded upon Fielding's work all manner of accusations about its moral unfitness, and even reflected that if Fielding pleased at all it was because he had learned the art from Pamela. Fielding, probably in answer to Richardson, in the preface to Familiar Letters says about the epistolary style: "...Much less is it adapted to the novel or story writer; for what difference is there, whether a tale is related this or any other way? And sure no one will contend that the epistolary style in general is the most proper to a novelist or that it hath been used by the best writers of this kind."

Fielding, though his work had begun in burlesque, was not groping blindly in his field. He had come to true interest in the novel and understood his creations. He felt assured that his work would live as he says in one of the little essays which precede the books of Tom Jones. He hopes that some "maiden Sophia, whose grandmother is yet unborn" will know and read his book:

Smollett and Sterne followed immediately

upon Richardson and Fielding and maintained for the realistic school the pre-eminence it had had from the beginning. Neither of them has contributed much to criticism, though Smollett's definition of a novel given in the preface to Ferdinand, Count Fathom, is full of interest and worth inserting here.

"A novel is a large diffused picture, comprehending the characters of life, disposed in different groups, and exhibited in various attitudes, for the purposes of an uniform plan, and general occurrence, to which every individual figure is subservient. But this plan cannot be executed with propriety, probability, or success, without a principal personage to attract the attention, unite the incidents, unwind the clue of the labyrinth, and at last close the scene by virtue of his own importance.

"Almost all the heroes of this kind, who, have hitherto succeeded on the English stage, are characters of transcendent worth, conducted through the vicissitudes of fortune, to that goal of happiness, which ever ought to be the repose of extraordinary desert. Yet the same principle by which we rejoice at the remuneration of merit, will teach

us to relish the disgrace and discomfiture of vice which is always an example of extensive use and influence because it leaves a deep impression of terror upon the minds of those who were not confirmed in the pursuit of morality and virtue, and while the balance wavers, enable the right scale to preponderate."

Though Smollett's books were written with a professed regard for the moral welfare of the world, they were not always received as contributions to morality. Miss Reeves, a critic not easy to satisfy when morality was considered, writing forty years later says that "on the whole, Smollett's works have a moral tendency".

Sterne's books and work add very little to criticism for they follow the realistic method laid out before and are realistic in their character portrayal as well as artistic. Sterne's disreputable life, for a clergyman at least, brought upon him so much opprobrium that the people of his day were hardly unprejudiced in their judgment of his work. Goldsmith attacks him for indecency and Walpole says of *Tristram Shandy* that though the "characters are

tolerably kept up, the humor is forever tempted and missed" and that the narration goes backward making the book a very insipid and tedious performance." Dr. Farmer, one of Sterne's contemporaries, predicted that in twenty years, the man who wished to refer to Tristram Shandy would have to inquire for it at an antiquaries. The verdict given by the Gentleman's Magazine is so interesting that is worth quoting rather fully.

"Of this work there can be neither epitome nor extract. The ninth volume consists of the same whimsical extravagances that filled the other eight, which as they owed part of their effect to novelty, must gradually please less and less, and at last grow tiresome.... It has been charged with gross indecency, and the charge is certainly true; but indecency does no mischief, at least such indecency as is found in Tristram Shandy; it will disgust a delicate mind, but it will not sully a chaste one: It tends as little to inflame the passions as Culpepper's Family Physician; on the contrary, as nastiness is the strongest antidote to desire, many parts of the work in question, that have been most severe-



ly treated by moralists and divines, are less likely to do ill than good, as far as chastity is immediately concerned. How far he is a friend to society who lessons the power of the most important of all passions by connecting disgusting images with its gratification, is another question. Perhaps he will be found to deserve the thanks of virtue no better than he who, to prevent gluttony, should prohibit the sale of any food till it had acquired a taste and smell that would substitute mausea for appetite..."

Miss Reeves says of it, "A lady should be ashamed of having read half of it,- a farrago of wit and humor, sense and nonsense, incoherency and extravagance. The author had the good fortune to make himself the ton of the day and not to go out of fashion during his life".

Sterne's work was highly profitable from a financial and materialistic point of view, at least. McElwin, in Eighteenth Century Men of Letters, says that he received seven hundred pounds for the second edition of the first two diminutive volumes of Tristram Shandy, and there were nine in all . Gray, in a letter to West, writes that "Tristram

Shandy is still a greater object of admiration, the man as well as the book. One is invited to dinner where he dines, a fortnight beforehand." Dr. Johnson says that Sterne had invitations for three months in advance and Sterne himself says complacently, "The honors paid me were the greatest that were ever known from the great."

Richardson and Fielding raised prose fiction to the rank of letters, and Smollett, Sterne, Johnson and Goldsmith, in the next score of years, added the prestige of their names to the support of the type. But the fact that some writers were doing worthy work in fiction does not free the type from just reproach and contempt generally. The liberty and needless candor which is only incidental in these leaders of fiction, becomes inexcusable when the author has nothing to offer but a morbid exaggeration of those faults. These indecent books were put out in cheap editions and were evidently widely read.

To add to their power for doing harm, the circulating libraries seem to have been conducted by persons of little discrimination and books of this

kind were more frequently circulated than any other. Miss Reeves, in her History of Romance, speaks with impatience of circulating libraries and asserts that they do more harm than good, because of the "second rate" books which they offered.

A list of the titles of novels noticed by the Gentleman's Magazine for May and June 1771, and the criticisms on them, will make Miss Feeve's classification of "second rate" seem generous. The complete list is given here to show proportion.

The Brothers. By a Lady, 2 vol.-- Notwithstanding we are always tender in censuring the productions of the fair sex, yet we must declare that it is a pity this lady has misspent so much time in scribbling, when she would have been better employed in darning her ruffles or working of cat-gut.

The History of Sir William Harrington. Written some years since, and revised and corrected by the late Mr. Richardson; now first published, 4 vols.-- The author's assertion that these volumes were revised and corrected by the late Mr. Richardson, has been publicly contradicted by advertise-

ments in the newspapers, to which he has replied with decency and propriety. Though the intelligent reader will certainly discover that this work is inferior to *Clarissa* or *Grandison*, yet we presume he will acknowledge that it is not entirely void of merit.

Belle Grove or the Fatal Seduction. 2 vols.

The Nun, or The Adventures of the Marchioness of Beauville.-- Lewd and indecent.

Sentimental Tales.

The History of Mr. Cecil and Miss Grey.

The Generous Inconstant. A novel. By a Lady.

Harriet, or The Innocent Adulteress. 2 vols.-

These volumes are written in a sprightly and agreeable style, but we would wish that she had amused herself upon a better subject than the amours between the D. of C. and Lady G., or in apologizing for a crime that has become too fashionable in the higher ranks of life.

The Fault Was All her Own. A novel in a series of letters. By a Lady.

A list of the worst titles for 1771;

Cukoldom Triumphant; or Matrimonial Incontinence.

Miss Melmoth; or the New Clarissa, 3 vols.

The Divorce; in a series of letters.

Jessy; or the Bridal Day, 2 vols.

The Jealous Mother; or Innocence Triumphant. 2 vols.

The Elopement; or Perfidy Punished. 2 vols.

Rosara; or The Adventures of an Actress.

3 vols.

Female Frailty.

The False Step; or the History of Mrs.

Brudenel.

The Fatal Compliance, 2 vols.

Memoirs of a Magdalen; or the History of Miss Louisa Wildman.

The Unguarded Moment. 2 vols.

The Married Victim; or the History of Lady Villars. 2 vols.

The Reclaimed Prostitute; or the Adventures of Amelia Sidney.

The list of titles were given to show how invariably the double title was used, as well as to show the nature of the stories. The Gentleman's Magazine was a conservative publication and published lists from the reliable printing houses only. There

were probably cheap printers who were less exacting than those whose books were announced through the Gentleman's Magazine. That periodical had given little attention to the novel at first. New ones from the press were occasionally listed in the section given to new books of poetry, or among the miscellaneous work. About 1750, however, a separate department was made for them and slight comment was sometimes added. Miss Peeves (History of Romance) says that "the year 1766 was very prolific in the Novel way, and indeed they seem to have over-run the press and become a drug in the terms of trade. The reviewers complain betterly of the fatigue of reading them".

Perhaps one of the conditions which worked greatest injury was the liberty of publishing anonymously. Fielding in the preface to his sister, Sarah Fielding's novel, David Simple, says that he promised never to publish even a pamphlet without setting his name to it, and adds:

"There is not, I believe (and it is bold to affirm) a single free Briton in this kingdom who hates his wife more heartily than I detest the Muses. They have, indeed, behaved to me like the most infamous harlots and have laid many a spurious as well

deformed production at my door; in all which my good friends, the critics, have, in their profound discernment discovered some resemblance of the parent; and thus I have been reputed and reported the author of half the scurrility, bawdy, treason, and blasphemy which these few last years have produced...

These my readers will do well to examine their own talents very strictly before they are too thoroughly convinced of their abilities to distinguish an author's style so accurately as from that only to pronounce an anonymous work to be his. For my own part, I can aver that there are few crimes of which I should have been more ashamed than of some writing laid to my charge." As one of the criticisms copied from the *Gentleman's Magazine* in the list given, shows, there was justification for Fielding's complaint, and other novelists had the same grounds for dissatisfaction with anonymous writing.

The extract quoted from the *Gentleman's Magazine* shows that women had entered the field of fiction and with no very noble or purifying purpose, often. Names of authors and authoresses are seldom given but many of the worst sounding titles are followed by some such phrase as "by a Lady of Quality",

or "by a young lady". The Gentleman's Magazine usually damns their work with faint praise or lays aside chivalric scruples and criticizes it severely. Fielding, however, in the preface to David Simple gives women novelists first place as portrayers of love.

In 1768 Sterne published the Sentimental Journey, which Miss Peeves ranks as an indisputable work of merit. The "irresistible Pathos" which pleased her attracted much attention, and the book was probably the first of a new class of novels which the reviews designate as sentimental. The germ of that type is to be found in Richardson, no doubt, and novels whose titles indicate sentimental qualities appear in the early sixties. The Sentimental Journey gave a definite model to the school, and novels bearing classification sentimental appear in the lists published by the Gentleman's Magazine. Mackenzie's Man of Feeling (1771), usually given as the best representative of that school, is merely listed without the classification. No comment whatever is given.

The same rather remarkable failure in discernment is shown in the reception given to Walpole's



Castle of Otranto (1764). It did not receive much attention if one may judge by the little comment preserved. The Gentleman's Magazine listed it without comment and only Walpole's friends said anything about it, apparently. Gray, Walpole's intimate friend, wrote a slight pleasantry, in one of his letters, about the ghostly element in the book. But the book ushered in a new school however it was received. In recent years special English students have given the Gothic Romance considerable attention but in its own day not much was said, apparently. The Gentleman's Magazine gives Mrs. Radcliffe's Mysteries of Udolpho (1794) a courteous and commendatory notice which agrees with our later day judgment of the book fairly well. According to Sylvanus Urban's reviewer the book has too much landscape painting, the suspense is too long sustained, and the conclusion too hasty, but he says the plot is admirably kept up and the style good. The conciseness of the criticism is a relief after the unvaried sermonizing which usually passed for criticism during that time. The criticism given by that publication to Clara Reeve's Old English Baron (1777) is equally courteous and to the point. She is criticized for calling a

story set in the time of Henry IV, Gothic, and the reviewer goes on courteously to say that the mistake probably rose from confusion with the Gothic style of building. He seemed to think that the term Gothic was intended to convey the idea that the main characters were Goths. This is the only time that any comment was made on the choice of titles. Miss Reeves as she later explained again in the History of Romance was opposed "to such a degree of the marvellous as to excite laughter." The reviewer calls attention to the fact that her less obvious exaggeration might pass for truth and induce weak minds to superstition.

In Northanger Abbey Miss Austen has an interesting parody of the inevitable locked chest of Gothic romance, and there are other passages to be found within stories of the time; yet there is less burlesque use made of the machinery of this type of stories than one would expect and fewer imitations were attempted than was the case with the other types. This is probably explained by the popular preference for love stories of the sentimental, pseudo-realistic class.

Mrs. Radcliffe is usually ranked as the best representative of the Gothic school, but from the point of view of criticism, Miss Reeves would be most important. She worked more self-consciously than Mrs. Radcliffe and, even if she did not know more of the history of prose fiction than others of her time, she did put her knowledge and ideas into literary form and thus preserved for us much interesting material. Coming as she did just before the novel arrived at the perfection of Jane Austen's art, her criticisms ought to be important.

She made an attempt to classify fiction, and to fix the limits of the terms Romance and Novel, but there is little originality in the work she does. Her definition for romance is little different from Johnson's in the Rambler for Saturday, March 31, 1750. They both apply the term romance to fabulous military stories. Johnson says, "military fable of the middle ages" and Miss Reeves adds the alternatives, "heroic fable, or Epic in Prose", to her definition. By novels they mean realistic contemporary stories. Miss Reeves' comment on the relation between the Epic and the Romance is hardly original enough to deserve

comment, for she knew Fielding and Smollett; and her criticisms of writers who preceded her in fiction usually agree with what had already been given. She did call forth numerous rejoinders in the Gentleman's Magazine to her publication, by saying that Pamela was Richardson's greatest work and by ascribing too many defects to Clarissa. The contest was carried on in anything but a pleasant manner, and offensive, abusive personalities were unrestrained. She is a thorough-going preacher in her attitude toward the moral side of her subject and gives that element first consideration in all her criticisms. The book in *?What one?* itself is pedantic and artificial to such a degree that it is diverting, almost laughable, and her novel way of arranging the matter is an interesting item of criticism for prose fiction. She puts the material in the form of dialogue between three persons—Hortensius, Euphrasia, (Miss Reeves) and Sophronia; Euphrasia is dictator and not always polite in her superiority. Most people would feel, too, that she gave herself the most sonorous appellation. She is defending fiction against the condem-

nation of Hortensius and he is hardly allowed a shield to return upon when the battle is over. So far as understanding technique goes she shows no advance over the criticism of twenty-five years earlier. All this seems rather hard to explain when Goldsmith and Fanny Burney had both published work of better quality than had gone before. Miss Reeves gives Goldsmith a line or two of attention but little appreciation. She says the Vicar of Wakefield "is a work of great merit and great faults, but must ever afford both pleasure and benefit to a good heart". With all her haste to dispose of the book, she could not neglect the "benefit to the heart".

Novels had grown better in the twenty years since the criticisms, first quoted, were written, and yet in 1793 the Gentleman's Magazine prints a most severe article on The Danger of Modern Novels. The indignant contributor says: "

"These gentlemen have counteracted the designs of the British Senate against Matrimony, and, in contempt of the Marriage Act, post chaises and young couples run smoothly on the Northern Road. All this and more we owe to novels... Unrestrained by that

disgusting sympathy, that timid coyness that checked the fancies of former ages, the modern muses are stark naked; and it is no vague assertion, that they have contributed more than any other cause to debauch the morals of the fair sex... What effect that graceless rapture and those broken periods which are in almost all novels may produce on untutored minds, let a thousand boarding schools witness."

It is hard to believe that such conditions were prevailing in a period that produced the work of Goldsmith, Fanny Burney, and Jane Austen, through whose work most people of modern times know the period. These writers inaugurated the realistic domestic novel, which marks the culmination of the first period of growth in fiction.

Study of preceding work and criticism seems somewhat purposeless when we at last arrive at Jane Austen, for she can not be said to have benefitted greatly by what had been done before, because she knew little about it critically. Every one knew Richardson and Tom Jones, at least, so she had no advantage over the other writers of the times, except in genius . She may have known Goldsmith but there

is nowhere any evidence that she made any study of his work or took any particular interest in it. Miss Burney shows the influence of Richardson, in the epistolary style, she chose for Evelina, and in the pictures of villains, too, perhaps, although her humor separates her pretty far from him. No critic of the day recorded his opinion of Miss Burney's work except in letters or reported conversation and the Gentleman's Magazine merely lists the book. It is reported that Burke sat up all night to read Evelina and that Sir Joshua Reynolds was fed while he read. The book was evidently very popular but was not critically discussed.

Goldsmith and Miss Austen now rank higher than any of the other writers of this period and yet they were almost neglected in their own time. Goldsmith was known chiefly by work done in other literary fields and that perhaps accounts in a measure for the critical neglect of the Vicar of Wakefield, but Miss Austen's lack of recognition can not be so explained. The manuscript of Pride and Prejudice was returned by publishers and lay neglected for over ten years. When at last the book was printed the Gentleman's

Magazines does not even list it with the new books.

Miss Austen arrived at her mastery of fiction instinctively and unconsciously, and evidently before people were able to appreciate her art, for recognition did not come until after her death.



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